

# Editorial Writing

Region Meet • 2021



You are a reporter for the Leaguetown **Press**, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School. From the given information, write an **editorial** as you would for the high school newspaper. Remember that as an editorial writer, you should support or oppose **policy or action**; you should not sermonize.

You have **45 minutes**.

Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or your entry. **Put your number on your paper.**

Leaguetown High School has 3,200 students enrolled in grades 9-12. Due to the pandemic, students have the option of attending school virtually. In March, 50% of the student body was still choosing this option, which is down from 85% in November. Last week, Principal Lydia Huerta announced that students must be physically present in school to take final exams. Huerta said she made her decision after she received numerous allegations about students who were attending school virtually cheating on final exams in December. The allegations came from teachers, students and parents.

Huerta also released a new exam schedule to reduce the number of students on campus at one time. Freshmen and sophomores will take their exams during the morning Monday through Thursday, and junior and seniors will take their exams in the afternoon. No students are exempted from final exams in May.

After Huerta's announcement, a group of parents and students started an online petition asking the school board to overturn Huerta's decision on final exams and allow virtual learners to take exams at home. More than 500 parents and 800 students have signed the online petition. The school board has not agreed to discuss the petition nor has any board member agreed to an interview. The next board meeting is April 28. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Tuesday, April 20.

## **THOSE SUPPORTING HUERTA'S DECISION**

Students who attend school virtually can receive help from other students, the internet, parents and others during final exams. It is unfair to the students who are present in school. Also, by allowing only half of the students on campus at one time, Huerta is creating a safe environment for all students.

## **THOSE OPPOSING HUERTA'S DECISION**

Forcing all students to take final exams on campus is unsafe. Some students have health issues. Some parents have health issues. Huerta should not force students to put themselves and their families at risk. Teachers can design exams to prevent cheating.

### **■ LYDIA HUERTA, principal**

"We all knew that students would have more access to help when attending school virtually. They could ask their parents for help. They could search the internet. They could call a friend. And for class assignments, getting help is not necessarily a bad thing, but it's different for final exams. Those exams test student knowledge. The key word here being 'student'.

"After our December exams, several teachers raised the issue of cheating. They said the virtual students were scoring 10 to 20 points higher than students who were in class. I also had parents and students talk to me about it.

■ **LYDIA HUERTA (cont.)**

Several students said their friends who were testing at home openly admitted to cheating.

“Mandating that all students take their exams on campus is the fairest option. By splitting the students into morning and afternoon shifts, we will reduce our numbers, and everyone will be distanced and safe. I have had calls from parents about students with health issues, and we can accommodate those students. They can test by themselves in the early morning or evening with a proctor. By then, all of our teachers will have been vaccinated. We will try to be flexible with times, but we will not be flexible about location.”

■ **LAUREN NEGRIE, math teacher**

“Teachers are thrilled with Ms. Huerta’s decision. It was obvious on the December exams that some virtual students were getting help on their exams. The average grade for my pre-cal final in December for in-school learners was 82. It was 93 for my virtual learners. My in-school learners have much higher daily grades, so something was definitely wrong.”

■ **MELONIE CATUONGA, English teacher**

“Our district has been extremely flexible for students this year. Southside ISD, which is just 12 miles away, eliminated virtual learning completely in December. Students are either in person, or they have to withdraw from school. Mandating students attend in person for final exams is not asking too much. I know some people are suggesting research papers instead of exams, but I simply don’t have time to grade 120 papers. Grades are due on Friday of exam week.”

■ **GAYLE HERMAN, sophomore**

“I have been attending virtual school all year. I have an autoimmune disease, and I’m not old enough for the vaccine yet. It simply isn’t safe for me to come to school. In fact, I really don’t go anywhere. I would love to return to school, but I can’t risk getting the virus. I didn’t cheat on any of my exams in December, and I am offended that Ms. Huerta seems to think all students cheated.”

■ **PEDRO MUÑOZ, senior**

“I’ve been on campus since November. All of my friends who are doing virtual school told me they got help for the December exams, and it showed. Their grades were a lot higher than mine. The funny thing is a lot of the students who are doing virtual learning are going out and doing all of kinds of stuff at other places. They are playing sports, going to the gym and restaurants, and hanging out with friends. They are not doing virtual learning because of the virus. They are doing it because it makes school easier.”

■ **CASSIE TEFORD, parent of a freshman**

“Requiring all students to be on campus for exams is unsafe and impractical. My husband and I both work and would not be able to take our son to school for a half-day of exams. We certainly don’t want him riding the school bus. I lost both of my parents to the virus. My family takes this pandemic very seriously, and we will not send our son to school until he is vaccinated or the virus is gone. If you look on the district’s website of COVID reporting, there are at least two cases of the virus at the school each month. Students are still spreading it to each other. The school board needs to intervene.”

■ **MARIA ARCURI, parent of a junior**

“There is a simple solution that keeps all students safe. Teachers could give projects instead of traditional exams. This would allow students to apply their knowledge instead of just regurgitate it, and location wouldn’t matter.”

**DO NOT PASS OUT TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST****EDITORIAL WRITING REGION • 2021  
CONTEST TIPS AND SAMPLE EDITORIALS**

*Contest Director: Give one copy to each judge to use during critique/judging. Also, staple one copy of the contest and one copy of the contest tips to each student's returned entry. The purpose of the tips is to provide immediate feedback to students. However, it is not meant to replace written comments from the judge.*

1. Lead with a statement of the situation and then take a clear, definite staff stance. The situation is the principal mandated that all students must take final exams in person.
2. As a general rule, use third person. If you must use a pronoun, use first person plural (we, meaning "we, the newspaper staff"). Do not use first person singular (I, me, mine) or second person (you). Avoid unnecessary use of pronouns. Rather than "We believe the principal should...", write instead, "The principal should."
3. Don't waddle into the editorial. Get right to the point and, as a general rule, don't ask a lot of questions. An editorial should answer questions, not ask them. Above all, remember that your purpose is to make thoughtful, logical arguments in support of your position, not to engage in a tirade. The editorial should not be long — 450 words at the most. Although it's not recommended all the time, sometimes a writer could use a feature opening to grab the readers' attention and get them into the story.
4. Look for the future angle. Your paper comes out before final exams.
5. Once you've stated your position/stance, the body of the story should support your stance and refute the opposition.
6. After the body of your editorial, complete the editorial with a specific solution.
7. Avoid direct quotes unless the quote adds substantially to the editorial. You can pull information from these quotes, as has been done here, but it's not necessary to attribute that information unless the person has a lot of credibility toward the story itself.
8. Watch for factual errors. Pay attention to minor details. Also, stay focused.
9. Don't clutter up the editorial with clichés or trite phrases such as "the principal is stupid" or any variation thereof. Also, edit out the name of the school unless it is necessary for clarity. It isn't necessary to say "Leaguetown Independent School District" or "Leaguetown High School." Students know the name of the school. They don't need to be reminded.

### **SAMPLE EDITORIAL/OPPOSING**

Because of rumors of students cheating on final exams in December, Principal Lydia Huerta announced that all students must take spring final exams in person. This is not only a knee-jerk reaction, it's also unsafe and unnecessary.

The school board needs to put this item on the agenda and take corrective action at its meeting on April 28 to allow virtual learners to take their exams in the same place they have been going to school all year — at home.

The pandemic is still here, and those who have not been vaccinated are still spreading the virus. In fact, on average the school reports two cases a month. Some students are immunocompromised. Without a vaccine, they are vulnerable, and their lives would be at risk if they had to come to school to take final exams.

Plus, teachers don't have to give traditional pen-and-paper exams. They could instead give projects or research papers that take several days to complete. This would level the playing field and actually allow the students to put what they learn to use instead of just regurgitating facts. Projects and research papers show a deeper level of learning.

Huerta's decision came without research, without asking for facts or evidence. She heard some students were cheating and made a decision. Students can cheat at school or at home. Moving all students to the school to take final exams will not solve the problem. Cheating is an integrity issue. Huerta should deal with that.

While Huerta will allow students to test in the early morning or evening with a single teacher, this still doesn't guarantee a 100% safe environment. The student would still have to touch doors, the desk, etc. A chance of infection still exists. It's not worth the risk.

The school board needs to address this issue to put the lives of students above a few rumors of cheating. Ask virtual learners to sign an integrity pledge, require students to have their cameras on or create better evaluations. So many safer options exist.

**SAMPLE EDITORIAL/SUPPORTING**

To level the playing field and reduce the cheating, Principal Lydia Huerta is mandating that students be in-person to take final exams this spring.

This is the right decision, and the school board does not need to intervene unless they want to give Huerta a vote of support.

The evidence of cheating is more than just allegations from parents and students. In math teacher Lauren Negrie's pre-calculus class, virtual learners scored on average 11 points higher than in-person learners on the final exam in December. But the odd thing is, the daily grades for in-person learners were much higher. Virtual learners can use the internet, ask a parent or friend or use notes on exams while in-person students can't. It's obvious virtual learners have an unfair advantage over in-person learners.

To create a safe environment where social distancing will be easy, Huerta changed the exam schedule so only half of the student body will be on campus at one time. She also will allow students to take exams in the early morning or evening with only a proctor in the room. And remember, all of the teachers will be vaccinated by then.

The school district has allowed students to learn virtually all school year. This is not the case in surrounding districts. Southside ISD mandated all students back on campus in January. Asking students to come in for final exams only is not asking too much. In fact, some students who are learning virtually play sports and attend other events. If they can do that, they can come to school for four half-days.

Those who oppose Huerta say teachers could change their exams and give projects or research papers instead of a paper-and-pen test. Projects and research papers do allow students to apply their knowledge, but they don't replace final exams. They don't allow teachers to test for specific knowledge, and teachers would not have enough time to grade those projects and research papers. Grades are due on Friday of exam week.

Huerta is being reasonable and accommodating. Every student should have the same experience and opportunity.